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ABSTRACT

The early childhood education program at Massachusetts' Middlesex Community College has included a service learning component for the past 3 years. Service learning participants have the opportunity to observe several different public and private early care and education programs in the community and to discuss the programs with other students. Participants are also asked to maintain journals which are shared with the instructor and, if students desire, with other students. The journals involve the following four phases of reflection: (1) concrete experience, or a description of specific behaviors which occurred during an incident; (2) reflective observation, or personal thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the events; (3) abstract conceptualization, illustrating the relationship between the experience and knowledge learned in the class; and (4) active experimentation, in which students apply learning to situations that they might encounter in the future. Students who choose to participate in service learning are excused from two assignments and their research papers are designed around their service learning placement. Although integrating service learning involves extra work and can mean sacrificing some valuable class time, it is well worth the effort as it gives students the opportunity to network, experience, and observe professional actively involved with children. (BCY)

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CARRY THE TORCH FOR YOUR DEPARTMENT INTO THE COMMUNITY

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Lyvier Conss, Executive Director of the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges. Campus Compact is a coalition of over 550 college and university presidents, who are committed to encouraging an ethic of public service and to promote service as an integral component of education. The Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges, housed at Mesa Community College in Mesa, Arizona, provides technical assistance on volunteer and service-learning programs specifically designed for community colleges nationwide.

Ms. Conss has been in the field of volunteer administration for over thirteen years. She directed an adult literacy program for six years in Imperial County, California. She serves on various educational committees in the areas of community and service-learning and international education. She is a frequent keynote speaker and workshop presenter in the areas of service-learning, community service and fund raising. Ms. Conss is a member of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives and volunteers for the Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa County. She earned her B.S. in Criminal Justice from Arizona State University , her Masters of Art in Organizational Management from University of Phoenix and attended Indiana University School of Law in Indianapolis.

Nancy Tyler Higgins, MS, MSW, Ph.D. candidate, is the Department Chairperson of Early Childhood Education at Middlesex Community College and a Clinical Social Worker in private practice working with children and families. Nancy has been in the field of early childhood education since 1975, as a child care director and prior to that an elementary school teacher. She taught and designed workshops and courses for the Office For Children, Department Of Social Services and presented at the New England Conference for the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Massachusetts Association for Day Care Providers, the Local and New England Resource and Referral Agencies and a New England Conference On Childhood Sexual Abuse. She began her college teaching in 1989 in the undergraduate program at Springfield College, School of Human Services teaching several core courses, and designing special topics in Child Growth and Development, Alcoholism, and Codependency . In the Graduate Program she taught several core courses, counseling courses and supervised MSW students and Master's Projects. In 1991 at Middlesex Community College, Nancy was an adjunct professor and in 1992 , the part time Early Childhood Program Coordinator. In 1993, she was appointed full time as the Department Chairperson of Early Childhood Education.

Nancy is married has three daughters, three sons-in-law and a grandson. All three of her children are in Human Services. Lisa a Clinical Social Worker, Tracey a Nurse Supervisor, and Carol a Teacher. Her Husband Richard is a United Methodist Minister and a Clinical Psychologist. Her grandson Joshua attends Montessori School.

Carry The Torch For Your Department Into The Community

There are several benefits in participating with your students in the Service Learning Project. Three years ago I was asked by my Division Dean, Pamela Edington, if I would participate in the Service Learning Project. It was a learning experience for my students, the community, and Middlesex Community College. Program Planning and Environments For Children is the class which I chose for the Service Learning Program.

As this was my first year as Chairperson of Early Childhood Education, I had several opportunities to meet with my peers and discuss the concerns, issues and the exceptional experiences in which our students were involved. The students provided me with information about their service learning through the journalizing process, class room reporting, and through a final paper which was integrated with the class research paper.

Many of the students chose early care and education programs in the area. In the Greater Lowell area and Middlesex County there are several private and public early care and education programs to be chosen for their service learning. Geralyn Vasile, the coordinator was and is very helpful in assisting the students to find child care centers and other placements. This helped build our resources of practicum and observation sites.

There were first year students and second year students in the Program Planning class. Some were doing their student teaching practicum and some were observing and volunteering in classrooms. The Program Planning class was a diverse classroom and proved to be an interesting and learning experience for all of us, the students, instructor, and the community. Several times during the semester I had the students share their experiences with the class. As the students would share, you could tell by the attention of the non participating service learning students that they were somewhat envious and wished they had signed up for the program. There was small group work for all the students providing discussion of the experience. This group work assisted the students to evaluate their placement and the work which they were doing with the children and the teachers in their placement.

I remember one of my students sharing her experience. I found her shared experience touching in the way that she described an elderly woman's loses. Her service learning took place in a nursing home. The student spent more time than was required. The student was learning an important lesson about losses and relationships. The woman 's family had died and this student was one of her very few visitors. The student shared what she had learned about loses and how the elderly are treated, often not being valued much like young children. She felt that there was not a lot of difference between children and elderly in that respect. She was amazed about the fact that in our society the elderly are not utilized. She could not understand why society does not consider their wisdom and experience. She said that she will always develop new friends so that she will not be left alone. She discussed the losses this woman had

experienced in her life time. She was adamant that this was not going to happen to her. She knew that she would experience losses but she indicated that she would choose younger friends as she got older. Several students asked her questions about what it was like for an elderly person to spend time in a nursing home, not having friends or family. The student felt it was sad for everyone involved. The student felt that she had learned a lot from her and visits. The student decided to continue to visit the woman even after the semester ended. I would say that this student had a valuable experience.

One of my peers also decided to participate in service learning and she shared her story about four young men in her Sociology Of The Family class. They participated in a child care center and they built book shelves for the classrooms. The center needed bookshelves but they could not afford them. The students provided their labor of love to the children by building them. Their experience of giving gave them opportunities to receive as the staff, the families, and the children showed their appreciation.

Other students worked with small groups of children for the first time in their lives and decided that becoming a teacher was exactly what they wanted. Several students felt that their experiences helped them pull together experience and theory.

Because of this Service Learning Program students begin observing in the Early Childhood Growth and Development course. This was new and valuable and an important part of the early childhood education program. It gave the students more opportunities to be with children and observe teachers model professionalism.

Currently during each semester at Middlesex Community College students participate in the Service Learning Program. The Service Learning participants have an opportunity to observe several different early care and education programs and to discuss these programs with other students. They learn early in their experience how early education teachers teach and how they work with staff and parents. This experience also benefits the shy student to make the transition into a classroom situation. I feel that the students who participate in service learning are more self confident and know what age group with which they want to work in doing their practicum.

The journal assignments are important as they reflect the feelings, experiences and learning of the students. The journals are shared with the instructor and with other students, if the students desire to do so. The students share four phases of reflection. The four phases of reflection are taken from the Service Learning handbook. They are:

- Phase I. **Concrete experience**. A description of specific behaviors which occurred during an incident or facts related to a particular situation.

- Phase II. **Reflective Observation**. Personal reflection about the events; the student's thoughts, feelings and perceptions; and how this event affected individuals.

- Phase III. **Abstract Conceptualization**. Relationship between the experience and knowledge learned in class. There is a focus upon what theories assisted the student in understanding the event observed.

- Phase IV. **Active Experimentation**. Allows the student to look at how this learning relates to other situations the student may encounter in the future. It allows the student to explore what he/she would do next time and what advice would the student would give others.

The students agreed that their journal reflection of their experience could be shared in this presentation providing some samples to examine. The students are proud of the work they are doing and feel and know that they truly make a difference in providing service in the community. They have the opportunity to understand while observing what works and what does not work within the early stages of their education. They are less intimidated in the process of looking for a practicum. It has often been the program's experience that many students decide to do their practicum at the site where they do their Service learning. This experience with professionals becomes a nice match for the students and the sites. The program works hard to make sure that every one knows each other and expectations are worked out in advance. The sites know our students are serious and trained. The sites look forward to having the students fifteen hours per week instead of three.

The syllabus reflects the importance of the Service Learning Program. In the first class, Service Learning is discussed as an option with an "awesome" experience. The Service Learning Coordinator spends time with the students and faculty going over the many options, rules and responsibilities. At this meeting there is a form which is given to both the student and site supervisor. They are asked to fill out the form at that time. There are four questions to answer.

The site supervisor answers the first three questions based upon the following:

- Describe your expectations of the student,

- Identify skills the student will use, and

- Identify skills to be learned doing service work.

The student writes what they want to learn. This helps the student to keep their focus. Early in the semester, the Service Learning Coordinator has an orientation meeting with site supervisors so they both have time for a one on one session to get to know each other.

The Service Learning Coordinator does a semester check in with sites, students, and instructors. At the end of the semester the students evaluate the program and receive acknowledgment for their commitment to service learning and to their community. This program gives the students the insight that it is serious and significant for all participants. Gerilyn Vasile designed a Service Learning Handbook which all faculty receive to assist them with the rules, responsibilities, and important guidelines for the journalizing process. The early childhood faculty add questions which are appropriate to the particular course to these guidelines.

Several students each semester are very interested in participating in the program. The students who choose service learning are excused from two assignments, (i.e. quiz or written assignment or observation). Their research paper is designed around their service learning placement. For example, if I have the students do a research paper, I ask them to draw the environment of their site as part of their paper and describe how it is developmentally appropriate. I also have them discuss whether they would leave it as is or design it differently. They need to give supporting information from texts and from class. They may also interview the site teacher for his or her opinions. There are several other parts of the research paper which are designed to work with the Service Learning. There is some deviation from the research paper of non Service Learning participants. For the Service Learning participants I prepare questions for their journal experience and these questions are based on age group, size of site, whether it is a public or private school, as well as their own reflections. The end results are the same. My intent is to have the students design a curriculum which is an age appropriate, diverse, anti bias environment; create a five day schedule; and present an example to the class.

There are frustrations involved and extra work with the integration of service-learning into the curriculum. Sometimes there is not enough time to cover everything in the class, so I need to prioritize what I want the students to learn and this takes time. Last semester I changed my course goals to reflect a multicultural piece and the effects of feminism and children in child care. Usually the students receive this information in the other education courses, however, I found it is important to give them some information around those issues so they have a basic understanding as they observe and volunteer. This was a good example of learning from the students what is not going on or not going on in classrooms for diversity. I gave an assignment of a multicultural check list and students came back with the assignment saying many classrooms did not have an anti bias/diverse curriculum. My syllabus reflects this goal and I needed to rewrite and redesign the child growth and development course to reflect that learning. This means that the other education courses need to be examined for overlap and for additional information. Of course this means time, energy, meetings, negotiating, planning, and presenting to the core curriculum committee.

The Service Learning component is certainly well worth the extra effort on behalf of the instructors. I have two early childhood instructors who are participating this semester. They also feel that this experience is an excellent

opportunity for our students to network, to experience, and to observe professionals actively involved with children. The "hands on" experience is sometimes worth more than a lecture because it allows the students to actively participate, utilizing knowledge, experience, and share the experience together. This type of learning stays with the student. The student can visualize both experience and intellectual content and hopefully see the importance of each.

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Campus Compact is a membership organization which supports a burgeoning level of community service activity among students, faculty and administration on over 500 college and university campuses across the country. Campus Compact awarded Maricopa County Community College District a sub-grant from ACTION, the federal volunteer agency, to establish a national technical assistance center. Thus, in November of 1990, the **Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges (CCNCCC)** opened its doors at Mesa Community College.

The Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges has a dual mission:
First, it serves as a national advocate for community colleges in service learning to sustain service learning as a national movement. Second, it serves member organizations and others in the promotion and implementation of community service as a means to improve teaching and learning to the ultimate benefit of students and the communities in which they live.

In addition to the benefits a member institution receives from the main Campus Compact office and the state offices, the CCNCCC will provide technical assistance designed specifically for community colleges in the following areas:

- Service-learning: the integration of service into the curriculum
- Strategies and program development to facilitate involvement in community service across the campus
- Recruitment and placement of participants in the community
- Consortia building with K-Ph.D. and community members
- Grant writing

Also the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges:

- Houses a national clearinghouse which collects and disseminates information on model programs from across the country
- Publishes a newsletter
- Conducts presentations at higher education conventions, as well as on-site technical assistance workshops
- Provides information on funding sources for service-related programs
- Serves as a funding agency for service-learning and community service programs to member institutions
- Builds relationships with policy makers and serves as an advocate for community colleges by analyzing relevant legislation and coordinating responses
- Pursues research agendas necessary to support the efforts of service-learning programs